

Researching New Visual Art in the 21st Century

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Abstract

My poster presentation represents several projects I have undertaken that examine and analyze trends in visual art in the twenty-first century:

One ongoing project represented in the poster session concerns work I do as the Advisory Editor for Contemporary Art for Grove Art Online (GAO), a compendium of current art historical scholarship covering world art from all periods, published online by Oxford University Press. As Advisory Editor I conceptualize, commission, and provide editorial oversight for 1-2 updates each year of 12-20 articles written around particular themes. For example, a 2011 update of 15 articles produced under my editorial supervision, titled “Visual Culture,” featured the emergence of visual culture as an interdisciplinary field of study that analyzes current issues and concepts in public art, new communication technologies, consumer culture, and globalization, among other arenas of culture. Besides serving as editor, I wrote one of the articles for the Visual Culture update, on the French installation artist Christian Boltanski.

A second project represented in the poster session is a book titled *Themes of Contemporary Art: Visual Art after 1980*, first published by Oxford University Press in 2005. My co-author Craig McDaniel and I have found that we need to keep updating the book because so much significant new art is being made in the twenty-first century. Artists keep challenging the paradigms and definitions of art with unusual materials, locations, content, and purposes. For example, in the second edition of the book, published in 2010, we added a new chapter on the theme of science in contemporary art, analyzing why and how many artists today are responding to discoveries and methodologies drawn from the sciences, especially the life science. The third edition, forthcoming in 2012, adds a new chapter on the theme of memory, looking at such topics as the role of public memorials in the contemporary world, and the influence of digital information flow and digital archives on the operations of personal and collective memory.

My research area—new art being made in the twenty-first century—poses a special challenge because “the tap is always open” regarding the objects I want to analyze. Artists keep making more art, and continue to push art in new directions. I am deeply grateful for the grant funding the university has provided, which has helped me at least attempt to keep up with the constant flood of new developments by traveling to study significant contemporary art projects first-hand. Some of my research as an editor and author for Grove Art Online has been supported by the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Initiative. Research for my book, *Themes of Contemporary Art*, has been supported by an IU New Frontiers in the Arts and Humanities grant.